

**Signature Assignment: Grades 6-12 ELA/ELD Framework Evaluation**

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## **Introduction and Background**

The California Department of Education's English Language Arts(ELA)/English Language Development (ELD) Framework is guided by four overarching goals: developing readiness for college, careers, and civic life; acquisition of the capacities of literate individuals; becoming broadly literate; and acquiring skills necessary for living and learning in the 21st Century (California Dept., 2014). These goals are achieved through the development of reading, speaking, writing, and inquiry skills, and the integration of relevant media and meaningful experiences. The program is also designed to use an interdisciplinary approach where students expand their literacy across subjects. This approach engages students in creative, collaborative, and globally focused learning experiences that utilize technology in meaningful ways with real world applications (California Dept., 2014). Teachers are tasked with collaborating to plan curriculum and making adjustments to meet the needs of their students. The California Common Core State Standards (CCSS) demand that "instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school" (California Dept., 2014). Indeed, literacy and language skills are necessary for students' advancement in all subject areas, so this framework was created with the intention of reinforcing this relationship.

The grade 6-12 ELA/ELD Framework goals are centered around five academic themes tied to Common Core standards: meaning making, language development, content knowledge, foundational skills, and effective expression (California Dept., 2014). The standards connected to meaning making require students to understand concepts and information from a variety of texts and media. They also assert that students should be able to convey meaningful content through both written and oral expression. CCSSs for language development ask that students be able to understand and apply appropriate vocabulary, along with proper grammar and syntax. Content

knowledge standards refer to a student's ability to make choices about how they employ specific language resources and structure depending on the discipline in which they are being applied (California Dept., 2014). Effective expression standards require students to develop arguments and present information via written assignments and group discussions. Foundational skill standards are analogous with language fluency and the ability to recognize printed language efficiently. Additionally, all of these standards and themes were developed to include learning programs for English Learners or students on IEPs. This paper will evaluate how the California ELA/ELD Framework for grades 6-12 develops efficient scope, sequence, articulation, and differentiation in the service of CCSSs.

### **Evaluation of Scope**

Ornstein and Hunkins describe scope as the breadth and the depth of a curriculum (2017). In grade 6, the curriculum serves as an introduction to the five previously mentioned themes of ELA/ELD Framework. Students entering this grade begin a transition from opinion based reading and writing activities to argumentative discussions and essays. Students participate in rhetorical writing activities, discussions, socratic seminars, and collaborative projects with their peers. They learn to appreciate the complexities of literature while deepening their knowledge of academic English (California Dept., 2014). All this is done by following the ELA/ELD literacy themes and their associated standards.

The standards related to meaning making are organized around four literacy competencies. The first of these competencies involves the students' ability to identify key facts within a text and how they relate to the main idea. The second competency requires students to look closely at the text in order to compare and contrast, explain, summarize, or determine what the facts show (California Dept., 2014). The third standard based competency asks that students

be able to analyze texts and support their arguments using evidence, and the fourth competency requires students to analyze the structure and organization of a text. The skills are revisited throughout grades 7 to 12, but each year there is an added dimension of depth and complexity.

Language development covers all the other areas of the ELA/ELD framework including comprehension of written texts, production of written assignments and oral presentations, vocabulary acquisition, and usage of standard English grammar (California Dept., 2016). The purpose of language development is to provide students with the basic skills required to succeed in all subject areas. Students learn to derive meaning from context, identify relationships between words, and understand and utilize effective word choice (California Dept., 2016). By the time they reach 12th grade, students' language proficiency should be sufficient enough to navigate college, careers, and independent life.

Starting in 6th grade, students are expected to effectively express themselves through rhetorical writing and discussions, utilizing credible sources and relevant evidence to support their claims (California Dept., 2016). In addition, students learn to develop thesis statements, and respond to texts using appropriate writing strategies and structure. Students will also learn to use descriptive details when writing narrative texts. As they become more independent in their writing processes, students are expected to review, edit, and revise their work using feedback provided by the teacher. Standards for effective expression require students to participate in collaborative discussions and oral presentations using grade appropriate language conventions (California Dept., 2016). As the students improve their ability to identify and correct their own errors, expectations for correctly using language conventions are increased from year-to-year.

Literacy standards for grades 6-12 emphasize the importance of both content knowledge and literacy (California Dept., 2016). Standards tied to the theme of content knowledge ensure

that students develop literacy and language skills across various subjects, and be able to understand content for each specific discipline. Students are expected to read a variety of print and digital texts spanning all genres of literature. “Proficient users of language in particular disciplines make language choices [...] to meet the expectations of their audiences”, and participate in numerous research opportunities (California Dept., 2016, p. 31). Starting in 6th grade, students begin to read an increasing amount of texts and documents that reflect grade level appropriate complexity. Students will also learn to annotate and record what they read, as they engage challenging texts.

The standards linked to the theme of foundational skills primarily focus on language fluency. Fluency refers to the ability to accuracy and rate at which students are able to decode written language (California Dept., 2016). Teachers should model appropriate pronunciation, provide students with opportunities to practice word identification, and reading skills should be modeled. The ELA/ELD curriculum framework ensures that students be engaged in independent reading activities with reachable goals, and be given support based on their needs. Students will also study word structure and etymology in order to enhance their ability to draw meaning from words (California Dept., 2016). The framework suggests that students practice memorization and recitation of short texts such as poetry. This framework supports student fluency with the goal of producing proficient readers capable of decoding language across a wide variety of texts.

### **Evaluation of Sequence**

When curricularists consider the sequence of a particular program, they seek to develop cumulative and continuous learning experiences with content and skills that build on one another (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017). The order in which specific content and competencies are presented to students often correlates with the cognitive development of the students. For example, in the

early stages of education, students are acquainted with concrete concepts and tasks, but as they get older they are incrementally introduced to abstract concepts. The California ELA/ELD framework for grades 6-12 is structured in a way that reflects this understanding of neurological development, and follows the learning principles of curricularists B. Othanel Smith, William Stanley, and Harlan Shores. The two principles most evident in the California ELA/ELD framework are simple-to-complex learning, and whole-to-part learning (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017). First they learn to look at the major parts of text, and eventually they should be able to identify important information in the minute details. For example, students in 6th grade begin learning how to derive the meaning and author's purpose from a text based on explicit factual evidence. As the year progresses, these students will learn to identify implicit meaning based on word choice, tone, and structure. Similarly, the complexity of the texts will increase as the year goes on. Students will initially encounter literature in familiar formats such as novels and articles, but eventually students will be expected to analyze more abstract literary texts such as poetry and music.

An important aspect of the California ELA/ELD framework for grades 6-12 is continuity. This involves the vertical repetition of curriculum components so that ideas and skills reappear from unit to unit and graded to grade (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017). In the ELA/ELD framework, essential concepts and skills are revisited, and there is often crossover between the five themes of the framework. This is accomplished by maintaining the same five themes for grades 6 through 12. Everytime a curriculum component reappears, there is an added layer of depth and complexity. The idea that curriculum should be structured in a manner that develops and redevelops knowledge and skills with increasing depth as students progress through their academic programs was defined by Jerome Bruner as the spiral curriculum (Ornstein & Hunkins,

2017). The ELA/ELD framework effectively employs this spiral structure, and is designed to help students master literacy and language skills. This type of spiral curriculum is also beneficial to teachers, who are now able to look back at what students have already learned to inform their curriculum decisions.

### **Evaluation of Articulation**

Ornstein & Hunkins describe articulation as the “vertical and horizontal interrelatedness of various aspects of the curriculum” (2017, p. 169). This notion refers to the manner in which early components of the curriculum are related to components that appear later. Articulation can be difficult to achieve, but the California ELA/ELD framework manages to successfully address this aspect of curriculum. The ELA/ELD framework is vertically articulated in order to ensure that students develop the necessary skills and bases of knowledge for coursework that they will experience in later grades. For example, 6th Grade English students may be tasked with producing a two page argumentative essay that incorporates 2-3 pieces of evidence taken directly from the text. By the time these students reach 12th grade, they will be expected to write an argumentative text between 5-6 pages long, which includes evidence from the text and other sources they have discovered through their own research. Students who fail to meet the California CCSSs for literacy and language will require extra support systems in order to succeed as they advance from one grade to another. For this reason, the ELA/ELD framework insists that teachers foster language-rich environments for their students, and use a variety of instructional strategies.

The ELA/ELD framework for grades 6 to 12 is also horizontally articulated in that it promotes interdisciplinary collaborative learning and curriculum development. It calls for literacy and language instruction to occur across curricula by complementing and contributing to

the content of other subjects (California Dept., 2017). Teachers are asked to work together to plan related curriculum and instructional materials, as well as identify students in need of support and modifications. Teachers across subjects are encouraged to plan joint projects, and develop inquiry-based assignments. The reasoning behind this horizontal articulation is that literacy and language skills are integral to all subjects, and that collaboration will allow for more meaningful and impactful learning experiences for the students. Every subject from middle school to high school has some form of literacy standard incorporated into the curriculum, and they can all be met through collaborative work.

### **Evaluation of Differentiation**

Differentiation involves adapting instructional strategies to meet the needs of all learners in an inclusive classroom (Borich, 2018). Teachers can provide differentiation by modifying the learning environment, instructional materials, instructional methods, and methods of evaluation. In order to adequately fulfill the needs of their students, teachers must make a genuine effort to get to know their pupils on a personal level. When students' needs are not met, there is an observable decline in motivation and engagement, and thus it is imperative that teachers provide differentiated instruction. The California ELA/ELD framework acknowledges that students come to class with varying levels of literacy and language skills, as well as cultural backgrounds and physical abilities. In order to create a safe and inclusive learning environment that maximizes student engagement, the ELA/ELD framework proposes several Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiation strategies.

For students with disabilities, the ELA/ELD framework suggests that teachers provide five different types of accommodations: changes in scheduling, changes in environment, changes in how the curriculum is presented, changes in how students respond, and behavioral strategies

(California Dept., 2016). Changes in scheduling may require that teachers provide extra time for breaks, extended time for tasks, or that they spread assignments across several lessons. Teachers may also choose to provide specialized furniture or lighting, along with lessons presented via multi-sensory techniques. Regardless of the strategies used, differentiation should be relevant to the students' needs, and be logistically feasible within the classroom environment.

EL students will also require certain accommodations and modifications in instructional methods. The ELA/ELD framework recommends that teachers follow the UDL guidelines of multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of expression (California Dept. 2016). For example, graphic organizers can be used to help students organize their thoughts, and sentence frames and word banks can provide students with the ideas on how to respond to questions. It is also suggested that teachers access their students' funds of knowledge in order to create more relevant content. Furthermore, ELs may need texts with vocabulary definitions in the margins, or videos with closed captions.

Regarding gifted students, the ELA/ELD framework states that it is critical for curriculum to match student ability "through a range of content acceleration strategies", and by challenging them each day (California Dept. 2016, p. 899). It is advised that gifted students be given plenty of opportunities to work independently on projects and topics they are passionate about. Assessments and tasks should call upon higher levels of depth of knowledge and complex skills. For example, gifted students can be asked to facilitate socratic seminars, or take down notes for other students.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the California ELA/ELD framework for grades 6-12 administers a cohesive curriculum that accounts for the needs of a diverse student population. There is a clear scope and

sequence designed to incrementally introduce students to skills and knowledge which build on one another over the course of their academic careers. Using simple-to-complex and whole-to-part learning sequences, students transition from opinion writing and concrete thinking, to rhetorical writing and abstract conceptualization. The recurrence of the five ELA/ELD themes that frame the curriculum allows for a continuous spiral of learning from grade to grade. By the time students reach the 12th grade, the goal is that they be equipped with the necessary skills to participate in college, careers, and civic life. The vertical articulation across grades and the horizontal articulation across subjects creates a curriculum that is meaningful, and that provides students with skills that can be applied beyond the confines of the classroom. By offering recommendations for UDL/differentiation strategies, the framework ensures that learners of various abilities and backgrounds are represented in the curriculum content.

Through the evaluation of this framework, I learned the importance of developing connections between both the content and other subjects. Collaboration with my peers will be an essential part of how I develop a curriculum, and will make the learning experience more engaging for both myself and my students. In addition, I learned that the skills that I impart on my students will need to be revisited continuously, with increasing levels of depth and complexity. Purposeful assessment and evaluation of results will give me a better sense of which skills to prioritize, and the types of support systems my students may need as they progress through the program. I will need to consider what the students have already learned, and what they will experience in the following grade levels. All of this can be accomplished by getting to know my students personally, and by creating a curriculum that reflects their unique identities.

## References

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